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SUBJECT Analysis of President Reagan's Speech

JIM LEHRER: The President has spoken. And now two leaders of Congress and four distinguished watchers of American politics will speak about what Mr. Reagan said. First, the congressional leaders: the House Majority Leader, Congressman Thomas Foley, Democrat of the State of Washington; and the Minority Whip of the Senate, Senator Alan Simpson, Republican of Wyoming, who are with us tonight from Capitol Hill.

Congressman Foley, generally, what did you think of the speech?

REP. THOMAS FOLEY: I thought it was a good speech. I think the President made many constructive and positive comments about his situation at the present time. I was glad to hear the President, for the first time, to my knowledge, concede that the policy of selling arms to Iran, especially in relation to the ransom of hostages, was a mistake. I would have preferred if he had broadened it to include all sales of arms to Iran. But in its important role as a ransom for hostages, he said it was a mistake. He said it clearly. I think that's important.

He said that he was going to respect the rule of law. He said it in a variety of ways, that he'd appointed Judge Webster, who had a long history as a federal judge and knew the rule of law: that the will of the White House would be respected, but also the will of the Congress; that the oversight function would be respected, that Congress would be consulted properly, in letter and spirit.

The President reasserted his belief that he has a responsibility for the key decisions of the National Security Council. I thought that was a healthy comment.

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him in confrontation. People come to him and they're charmed and they say, you know, "You brought us in here to talk to us, but we had something on our minds. We were angry when we came in here, and you've come in here and charmed us like sage hens off the nest, and we're tired of it."

And he said, "Whose fault is that?"

Now, that's the way he really is.

He and Jim Wright have had some interesting discussions in depth, and they'll have a lot more. And I hope they have a lot more right there at the Oval Office.

The point is, we've got to bring Senator Byrd and Speaker Wright into the game and get on with the action. That's what we've got to do.

LEHRER: Speaking of that, let's go to Congressman Foley.

One of the points that was made, that the President has now said, "Okay. I accept everything that was in the report." And the point was made, I think by Ray Price, earlier, "Let's hear now from the Congress."

Are you going to accept the one recommendation there, which was to come up with a Joint Intelligence Committee that would hold down on leaks and better facilitate the oversight role?

REP. FOLEY: I doubt that that will be accepted.

And by the way, the President isn't necessarily following exactly the Tower Commission recommendations. They didn't recommend that he abolish all covert actions. He's going beyond that.

But I think the Congress will maintain separate committees. And frankly, I don't think there's a record that can be established that the Intelligence Committees have been the source of most of the leaks that have come out of government. I think when you talk about leaks in government and read The Post and other newspapers in this town every day, you'll see most of the leaks are attributed to Administration officials.

[Confusion of voices]

REP. FOLEY: Could I make one other point?

The President said that he wanted to cooperate, finish the investigation. I think that the committees that have been

selected to do that want to do that on a bipartisan basis. One of the problems is finding out where this money went. And it was one of the outrages of this situation that officers of the National Security Council staff, Colonel North in particular, participated in covert conspiracies to set up bank accounts in Switzerland, the Cayman Islands, in Panama, and other places; and now we investigating this matter, with the support of the government, cannot find out what the records of the government's own secret bank accounts were. These were not private accounts. They were NSC accounts set up to pay [unintelligible] covert activities of the NSC.

And the President ought to step in and instruct the Attorney General to request the banking authorities in these countries to recognize that these are secret government accounts, and get the records to the investigating committees.

SENATOR SIMPSON: We're going to get that. And the overworked word in America these days is "outrage." You don't have to be outraged about everything to get things done.

REP. FOLEY: I'm not outraged about it.

SENATOR SIMPSON: I know you're not. You never are.

LEHRER: He's talking about -- he's talking about me. I used the word.

SENATOR SIMPSON: No, I know. But we're going to replace that word this year with the word "competitiveness," as we discuss trade.

[Laughter]

LEHRER: But I tell you, I tell you, I think the House and Senate Intelligence Committee are colanders of leaks, and it comes from the staff. It doesn't come from the principals. The staff is admitted into the clean room in the Capitol, they're admitted into the clean rooms as they do their business. And let me tell you, when you're 30 years old or 34 and you're carrying all that wisdom and heavy stuff in your head, they are going to go tell it.

REP. FOLEY: I'd like anybody tonight to name one recent example of a leak from the Intelligence Committees of the House or the Senate that compromised American security.

SENATOR SIMPSON: They used to appear on the cover of the New York Times. They haven't quit, have they?

REP. FOLEY: Well, I mean, if there are a lot of them, they ought to be able to be named. Somebody ought to name them.

LEHRER: Ben Wattenberg.

WATTENBERG: Maybe I could just try to resolve this question about anger and why the President didn't show it.

Let us stipulate that Ronald Reagan is not as angry with Admiral Poindexter and Colonel North as Arthur Schlesinger is. North and Poindexter were doing, substantively, what the President wanted done. He wanted arms to go to Iran. They did it, wrongly. But -- in a wrong way. He wanted money to go to the Contras because he believes passionately in that cause, and it went there. And North's problem and Poindexter's problem, and that [unintelligible] fellow, I guess, is that they acted not wisely, but too well.

Arthur Schlesinger has an article in this week's New Republic about American foreign policy that is 179 1/2 degrees different from Ronald Reagan's conception of the Ronald Doctrine, of American exceptionalism, of all these sorts of things. And Arthur's view is a very respectable one. I think it kind of leans a little bit toward isolationism, that says we ought to pull back and just be another nation.

So, that's why Dr. Schlesinger is more angry than President Reagan.

REP. FOLEY: Let me just make a point, if I may, that, you know, we can take positions on Contra aid, whether it's right or wrong. But I think the President tonight admitted that illegal diversions or improper diversions of funds is not right.

WATTENBERG: Absolutely.

REP. FOLEY: And I think the general opinion of people in this country, Republicans and Democrats, would be that the sale of arms to Iran, for any reason, was not correct, and especially to ransom hostages.

And the importance of consultation with the Congress is not to satisfy the Congress for its own sake, but because if the President had followed the requirements of consultation with the Intelligence Committees and to eliminate the partisanship of this, if he just did it with Republicans alone, which obviously would be wrong, the Republican members of the Intelligence Committees of the House and the Senate would, to a person, have advised against the sale of arms of Iran.

It was the failure of keeping the law that got the Administration into this embarrassment, and that's why it should be corrected.